

## Script for “Routes to the Gold Fields” Power Point

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| Slide #1 | Title: Routes to the Gold Fields  |
| Slide #2 | On January 28, 1848 James Marshall, a carpenter, discovered gold at John Sutter’s lumber mill along the American River.   |
| Slide #3 | <p>When news of the gold discovery and samples of gold reached San Francisco and other towns in California, people headed to the mountains. President Polk announced to Congress on December 5, 1848 that the reports of gold in California were in fact true. Rumors of gold that was easy to find spread through the United States and the world.</p> <p><b>Challenge #1: If gold was discovered in January, why did it take so long for news to spread?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation was limited.</li> <li>• No established mail routes.</li> <li>• People were skeptical about the gold</li> </ul> |
| Slide #4 | <p><b>Challenge #2: From which countries did the Argonauts come?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastern United States, Hawaii</li> <li>• China</li> <li>• Australia</li> <li>• South America—Peru, Chile</li> <li>• Mexico</li> <li>• Europe—British Isles, Germany, France</li> </ul>  |
| Slide #5 | <p><b>How Shall We Travel?</b></p> <p>For Americans living in the eastern United States there were three main routes to the gold fields: sailing by ship around Cape Horn, travel across the Isthmus of Panama, or take a wagon train across the United States.</p>   |
| Slide #6 | <p><b>Sea Route—Cape Horn</b></p> <p>Before 1849 the Cape Horn route was the most traveled one. Argonauts traveled by ship south along the Atlantic coast of the United States, around the southern tip of South America known as Cape Horn, and then into the Pacific Ocean.</p>   |
| Slide #7 | The ship would then sail north along the Pacific coast to San Francisco Bay where the passengers would disembark.   |
| Slide #8 | <p>This was a long journey of 18,000 nautical miles.</p> <p>It took five to eight months to reach California.</p>   |
| Slide #9 | <b>Challenge #3: What dangers did the Argonauts face along the Cape Horn route to California?</b>   |
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| Slide #10 | <p><b>Dangers—Overcrowding</b></p> <p>Overcrowding on ships was a major problem the Argonauts faced. Greedy shipping agents would sell more tickets to passengers than the ship could actually hold. For example, if a ship was supposed to only carry one hundred passengers, the shipping agent, in order to make a better profit, might book as many as two hundred passengers.</p> <p><b>Challenge #5: Why would over-selling passage on a ship be dangerous?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ship might be able to only carry enough supplies, such as food and water, for a six month journey for one hundred passengers. This would lead to food and water shortages.</li> <li>• Problems with sanitation.</li> <li>• Quick spread of disease.</li> </ul> |
| Slide #11 | <p><b>Dangers—Disease</b></p> <p>Germs spread quickly through crowded ships. Sickness, such as cholera, killed many passengers and crew members. There was no way to fight cholera and those that caught it died within four to twelve hours. Scurvy was another common ship disease caused by a lack of vitamin C. If the ship's supply of fruits and vegetables ran out then scurvy could become a problem and kill scores of passengers.</p>   |
| Slide #12 | <p><b>Dangers—Cape Horn</b></p> <p>At the very southern tip of South America, Cape Horn is known as one of the stormiest, rockiest coastlines in the world. Many ships carrying eager gold seekers capsized in the stormy waters.</p>   |
| Slide #13 | <p><b>By Land and Sea—Isthmus of Panama</b></p> <p>Many gold seekers feared that the gold would be all gone by the time they actually reached California. Argonauts that wanted a faster route would sail to the Isthmus of Panama and the port town of Chagres (pronounced Cha-gris).</p>  |
| Slide #14 | <p><b>By Land and Sea—Isthmus of Panama</b></p> <p>From there they traveled by small boat up the Chagres River and then rode mules through the jungle to the other side of the isthmus.</p> <p>Once they arrived in Panama City Argonauts had to wait for a ship to sail them up the Pacific coast to San Francisco Bay. Sometimes they would have to wait for months before they could buy a ticket on a ship.</p>   |

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| Slide #15 | <p><b>By Land and Sea—Isthmus of Panama</b></p> <p>By 1850 the journey took only 6 to 8 weeks.</p> <p><b>Challenge #5: What dangers did the Argonauts face during their journey across the Isthmus of Panama?</b></p>  |
| Slide #16 | <p><b>Danger—Disease</b></p> <p>The greatest danger Argonauts faced journeying across Panama was disease. Mosquitoes infected thousands of gold seekers with malaria and yellow fever as they traveled through the Panama jungles or waited in Panama City for a ship. With no cure for the diseases many men died before they ever reached California.</p>  |
| Slide #17 | <p><b>Land Route</b></p> <p>A majority of the gold seekers would ultimately travel overland on the 2,000-mile California Trail, a four to five month journey. After learning about the gold many Argonauts had to wait until the spring of 1849 when the overland trails became passable again after winter. Leaving either Council Bluffs, St. Joseph or Independence wagon trains would travel across rivers, through great prairies and desert, and over the Rocky and Sierra Nevada mountains before reaching California and the gold fields. Some of the wagon trains were miles long.</p>  |
| Slide #18 | <p><b>Oxen, Mules, or Horses?</b></p> <p>Horses were expensive (about \$200 a horse) and their upkeep was demanding. They needed grain to supplement their diet and were easily bothered by insects and bad water. A team of 8 or 10 strong mules could travel fast, but were often tricky to handle. Mules also had tendencies to bolt and become unruly. Most emigrants chose oxen to pull their wagons. Although slower, oxen were more reliable and tougher than mules. They could eat the prairie grass and were less expensive than horses or mules (about \$50 per ox). Oxen were very strong and could haul fully-loaded wagons over the rough terrain. A large wagon needed at least three pairs of oxen to pull it.</p> <p><b>Challenge #6: What dangers did the Argonauts encounter along the California Trail?</b></p> |
| Slide #19 | <p><b>Dangers—mountains and rivers</b></p> <p>The mountains and rivers the wagons would cross posed some of the greatest dangers to the Argonauts. In preparing for their trip the major decision they had to make was when to begin their journey. The best time to leave for California was mid-April. If they left too early then snow on the prairies and in the mountains would block</p>   |

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|           | <p>the trail. Rivers swollen with snow melt and spring rain would make river crossings extremely dangerous. The swift currents could overturn wagons or frighten animals. If the wagon trains left too late in the year there would be little grass for the livestock along the trail and they would get trapped in the heavy snows in the Sierra Nevadas like the Donner Party.</p>  |
| Slide #20 | <p><b>Dangers—Accidents</b></p> <p>Being run over by wagon wheels was the most frequent cause of injury or death. Both children and adults could slip while getting out of a wagon and fall beneath the wheels. Children were especially susceptible to being run over by heavy wagons.</p> <p><b>Firearms</b> were the second leading cause of emigrant injury and death and a surprisingly large number of pioneers were injured by guns accidentally going off. It was usually safer to keep rifles unloaded.</p> <p>The third cause was injuries from livestock. Indians proved not to be any real danger to most pioneers. Other causes of injury or death included, lightning, hailstorms, grassfires, gunpowder explosions, snakebite and suicide.</p> |
| Slide #21 | <p><b>Dangers--Disease</b></p> <p>Diseases and serious illnesses caused the deaths of one out of ten pioneers. Such diseases as cholera, small pox, flu, measles, mumps, and tuberculosis could spread quickly through an entire wagon camp. Asiatic cholera was the main disease emigrants feared most on the trail. Caused by contaminated drinking water, it could attack a perfectly healthy person after breakfast and he would be in his grave by noon. However, many would linger in misery for weeks in the bouncy wagons. Thousands of grave sites lined the California Trail from Missouri to California.</p>   |
| Slide #22 | <p><b>The Gold Fields!</b></p> <p>Once the Argonauts reached California, either by land or sea, they would head to the gold fields in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Between 1848 and 1852, California's population grew from 14,000 to 223,000 as people came from all over the world in search of gold.</p> <p><b>Challenge #7: What challenges did this sudden increase in population bring to California's economy and government?</b></p>   |